

Health and Fitness (part 2 of 2)

Description: The role of fitness and exercise in the life of a believer.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2017 IslamReligion.com)

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Category: Lessons > [Islamic Lifestyle, Morals and Practices](#) > [Dietary Laws](#)

Objective

- To understand our obligation to keep fit and healthy, and to understand that exercise can be as simple as walking.

Arabic Terms

- *Ibadah* " worship.
- *Sahabah* " the plural form of "Sahabi," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.
- *Hadith* - (plural " *ahadith* ") is a piece of information or a story. In Islam, it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Masjid* - the Arabic term for mosque.

Introduction

Islam's holistic approach to health means that we must invest time and effort into our physical and emotional needs as well as our spiritual state. Our bodies are a complex set of cells, organs and systems on loan to us from Allah, therefore we are obligated to keep them in good working order. In the first lesson, we discussed the role of nutrition and diet and now we will look at the function of fitness and exercise.



When Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, stated that a strong believer was better than a weak believer he was not only talking in terms of faith and character. He was also indicating that physical strength was a desirable trait for a believer to have. Each person has their own set of physical capabilities determined by Allah and accordingly each one of us must aim to achieve our own state of optimum health and fitness. The obligatory acts of Islam, under normal circumstances, do require some physical effort. When making the postures of prayer we use all the muscles and joints of the body. A person must be in good health if they intend to fast and the pilgrimage to Mecca is a strenuous undertaking.

Fitness

Prophet Muhammad and the *sahabah* were physically fit by virtue of their lifestyles; life was harder, and farming and hunting required strength and endurance. People in the previous centuries walked longer distances, ate more natural foodstuffs, and generally had to be fit in order to sustain their lives. Even though we may not have direct control over illness and injury Allah expects us to treat our bodies with respect and to do everything we can to maintain them in good condition.

Nowadays we are plagued by a number of conditions and illnesses that are directly related to unhealthy lifestyles and lack of exercise. Some chronic conditions can be improved and sometimes even reversed by paying attention to our fitness. It is worth remembering that we will be called to account if we fail to take measures to improve our declining health.

We are able to read numerous *ahadith* that attest to the fact that Prophet Muhammad consistently advised the *sahabah* to keep fit and to live a lifestyle conducive to good health. He said *oeO Allah, make the early morning hours blessed for my nation.*"[\[1\]](#) Consequently the *sahabah* were all early risers, they did not stay up all night engaging in useless pastimes. Prophet Muhammad would go to sleep after the *Isha* prayer,[\[2\]](#) and he was known to advise others that our bodies have rights over us[\[3\]](#).

Exercise

Exercise plays an integral part in the life of a believer and moderate exercise will improve our *ibadah* immensely. However, letting an exercise regime or sport become extreme or fanatical will impede our emotional and spiritual health. To this end there are some guidelines in regards to exercise and sports.

1. Nothing is more important than the obligatory acts of *ibadah*.
2. The believer must pay attention to time management in order that exercise does not impede on the time needed for earning a living and the time spent with the family.
3. Physical activity can be pursued with all members of the family. For example walking, hiking, swimming and horse-riding.
4. The person playing sports in a public place must remember the Islamic dress code.
5. Sports and exercise should not involve any unnecessary mixing of the sexes.
6. A believer does not use bad language or engage in the ridiculing of another player.
7. Believers do not use, or encourage others to use, performance enhancing drugs.

The behavior of Prophet Muhammad, the *sahabah*, and the early generations of Muslims displays what nowadays would be thought of as best practice in the field of

exercise. They engaged in multiple sports and activities, all of which kept their minds and bodies supple and healthy.

oeAny action without the remembrance of God is either a diversion or heedlessness except four acts: Walking from target to target [during archery practice], training a horse, playing with one's family, and learning to swim."[\[4\]](#)

The Prophet passed by some people from the tribe of Aslam while they were competing in an archery competition. He said to them, 'Shoot oh children of Prophet Ishmael. Your father was a skilled marksman. Shoot and I am with so and so.' One of the two teams then stopped shooting. The Prophet asked, 'Why did you stop?' They answered, 'How could we shoot while you are with them (the other team). He then said, 'Shoot and I am with you all.'[\[5\]](#)

Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad said, oel raced with the Prophet and I beat him. Later when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won. Then he said, 'this cancels that (referring to the previous race).'"[\[6\]](#)

It is never too late to begin an exercise regime, however there is no necessity to punish your body by engaging in sports and activities that you are not yet fit enough to take part in. Begin slowly. It is possible to build up your fitness level just by walking. Walking is one activity that the *sahabah* engaged in every day and we can even read descriptions of Prophet Muhammad's way of walking. The benefits of walking for just 30 minutes a day are numerous.

1. Increased cardio and pulmonary (heart and lung) fitness.
2. Reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.
3. Improved management of conditions such as hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol, and diabetes.
4. Stronger bones, reduced muscular and joint pain, and improved balance.
5. Increased endurance and reduced body fat.

Walking also holds many extra benefits for a believer. Prophet Muhammad said that the people who receive the greatest rewards for their prayer are the ones who walk the furthest distance to the *masjid*.[\[7\]](#) He also said that the person who purifies himself in his home, then walks to the *masjid* to perform one of the duties enjoined on him by Allah, will gain rewards for every two steps he takes. The first will erase a sin and the other will raise his status one degree.[\[8\]](#)

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Imam Ahmad

[2] *Ibn Majah*

[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

[4] *At-Tabarani*

[5] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[6] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[7] *Saheeh Muslim*

[8] *Saheeh Muslim*

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